

# Neighborhood Organizing

*Help Yourself!*  
*How to Use the Neighborhood Matching Fund*

City of Seattle  
Department of Neighborhoods  
*to Build Community*

Written by Katie Klingelhofer

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*Help Yourself!*

# ***How to Use the Neighborhood Matching Fund to Build Community***

In the Help Yourself! series:

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Children's Play Areas  
Environmental Projects  
Neighborhood Organizing  
Public School Partnerships

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Mayor's letter

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*Richard Wells*, Brighton-Dunlap Community Council

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# Neighborhood Organizing: An Introduction

## A Broad Definition

The words “community organizing” mean many different things to different people. That may be because there are many different kinds of “community.” There are geographic communities, such as neighborhoods. There are work communities and religious, cultural, and political communities. And there are communities based on age, race, gender, mental or physical ability, and various personal interests. So why do communities organize? The two most basic reasons are to bind the community together and to get something done through collective action. A well organized group of people can be a powerful and influential force.

This booklet is about neighborhood organizing. Since any neighborhood is made up of many communities, the real challenge in organizing is finding ways to bring together those different communities. This is especially true today because of the dramatic ways that neighborhoods have changed over the past few decades. The neighborhood used to be the center of community life. People knew their neighbors and looked out for one another. Today people seldom know their neighbors, let alone share values or cultural background with them. In some instances they do not even speak the same language. Through neighborhood organizing, people work with and get to know each other.

Once a neighborhood community group has been formed, people can use their collective power to make things happen. This booklet outlines a few things to keep in mind when forming and running a neighborhood group. It draws on the experience of a number of Seattle’s community-based organizations. The examples show how community residents have organized themselves and taken advantage of the changes occurring in neighborhoods today.

## Why Neighborhoods Organize

Although there are many reasons why neighborhoods organize, most of them fall into three general categories. Neighborhoods organize to: 1) address a particular concern, 2) empower residents, and 3) build community. It is not unusual for a group to be motivated by all three of these reasons. However, as the following examples of Neighborhood Matching Fund projects illustrate, most groups tend to fall primarily into one of these categories.

### **Address a Particular Concern: Meadowbrook Wetlands Restoration Project and East Capitol Hill Babysitting Co-op**

The Meadowbrook Wetlands Restoration Project in the Lake City area of Seattle provides an example of organizing to address a particular concern. The Nathan Hale High School playfield was too soggy and wet

to play on most of the time. The area, once a natural wetland, had been filled in to create the playfield. Janine VanSanden and others on the Meadowbrook Advisory Council wanted to restore the area to its original state, which would alleviate drainage problems and create an attractive recreational space.

The project involved a great deal of community education. Many people were unfamiliar with the concept of a wetland. However, once people learned that this restored wetland would add aesthetic value to the neighborhood, serve as a potential laboratory for school biology and horticulture projects, and improve the state of the playing fields, the community rallied behind the project. Individuals and local organizations wrote letters of support to the Department of Neighborhoods and anxiously awaited approval of the project from the Department of Parks and Recreation and Department of Construction and Land Use. Organizers distributed fliers announcing community meetings and the local news media gave the project considerable coverage. This helped attract eager volunteers who worked every other weekend for a year to restore the wetland. Today the project provides for the neighborhood a pleasant recreational space with ponds, native trees and plants, and even a bridge. In addition, the playfields stay dry.

The babysitting co-op that started in East Capitol Hill over 10 years ago is another example of organizing to address a particular concern and then going on to address other issues. It is on a smaller scale and less complex than the wetlands restoration project—and it required no money! Penny Bolton organized the co-op, starting with eight families who lived within four blocks of each other. The idea was to trade babysitting, and poker chips were used to keep track of time—white chips were worth one hour, blue and red chips were worth half an hour. Each member started with 15 hours worth of chips, realizing that they would have to pay back those 15 hours in babysitting time. Everyone received a master list of members and their children.

Bolton's tips for running a successful co-op include getting to know your neighbors. Organizing house meetings or potlucks two or three times a year allows people to become familiar with one another and feel more comfortable about trading babysitting. Co-op members need to keep in mind that it is okay to say no to a request to babysit: people are not expected to drop everything just because they are in the co-op. And people need to make an effort to trade with more than one family in order for the co-op to work.

Bolton believes that the success of the co-op is responsible for the success of the Frazier Park Playground Project. The co-op provided a core group of neighborhood organizers with experience that led to an effort to raise money to buy new playground equipment for Frazier Park. Community members responded generously with time and money, which they maximized by applying for a Neighborhood Matching Fund award from the Department of Neighborhoods.

## **Empower Residents: Brighton-Dunlap Community Council**

Some community organizers believe that the only reason to organize is for power. Richard Wells of the Brighton-Dunlap Community Council believes that “getting power” is what it is all about. Power is the ability to act and with it comes a responsibility to the larger community. Neighborhood organizations acquire power when people join together to get something done.

The Brighton-Dunlap Community Council did not form in response to a specific issue. It started with the hiring of professional community organizer Richard Wells through the Neighborhood Matching Fund. Wells's goal was to organize and empower the residents of the Brighton and Dunlap neighborhoods, two of the poorest in Seattle's Rainier Valley. He began by conducting one-on-one interviews with 150 people in the community. He chose 10 of these people to be the Council's organizational leaders and trained them to run meetings and form teams to identify issues. The core of this organizing approach is the building of personal relationships. After Wells had cultivated a relationship with each, the leaders went on to develop relationships within the larger community.

Angela Toussaint understands that her role as a Brighton-Dunlap leader gives her responsibility for the organization. She stresses the importance of being strategic, working hard, and having a clear vision. This discipline and trust building make an organization effective.

One of the first issues that the Brighton-Dunlap Community Council addressed was substandard goods and services at a local supermarket. Council leaders created research teams which discovered that not only were the supermarkets in south Seattle more expensive than those in north Seattle, they also had lower quality goods. The Council developed a campaign that included negotiating with supermarket managers. This work culminated in a public meeting in the supermarket parking lot. At the meeting, Community Council leaders demanded that the supermarket become accountable to the public. Over 80 people attended the public meeting, including the press. This visible, community-driven campaign resulted in the supermarket managers agreeing to quarterly inspections. That outcome in turn built credibility for the organization as it began to tackle more complex issues. The Community Council went on to address issues ranging from infant mortality to safety for seniors.

## **Build Community: Fremont Capacity-Building Project**

The Capacity-Building Project of the Fremont Neighborhood Council provides an especially good example of organizing to build community. The Project conducted an opportunities assessment and organized around talents in the community. It grew out of two of the Council's previous projects. One was the Chemical Free Fremont Campaign, an educational outreach project on household hazardous waste. Outside funding enabled Chemical Free Fremont to contact every household in Fremont through canvassing, mailings, and phone calls. Community response was overwhelming and provided the Council with a tremendous base on which to build future projects. The Council's other previous project was the Neighborhood Support Project, which involved working with a local community service agency to reach Fremont residents with developmental disabilities and include them in community activities. This project emphasized the wide range of skills that are useful contributions to a community.

The Capacity-Building Project is built around the idea that a community can benefit and grow from the diverse skills of its residents. The Project aimed to discover the many talents that exist in Fremont. First a survey was mailed to all households that had responded to the Chemical Free Fremont Campaign and then follow-up was made via telephone interviews and small house meetings. In the process of conducting these interviews, the Neighborhood Council increased its membership 50 percent! Information on people's various talents and skills was entered into a data base and made available to any community group in Fremont.

This effort builds community by organizing around something positive: people's talents. According to organizer Michael Gilbert, this Neighborhood Matching Fund-supported project has created tremendous excitement among community leaders who see "capacity" as a new way to motivate people. Gilbert is already busy working on the Fremont Time Project, which builds on the Capacity-Building Project by establishing a computerized network to enable people to exchange talents and skills. Skill givers would receive no cash but make exchanges with other skill givers in the community.

## **Re-defining Community: Homeless Organizing**

We may need to reexamine our concept of community in some instances. When the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project proposed to organize and develop leadership among downtown Seattle's homeless population of Latino migrant farm workers, many people questioned whether a community could be built among a transient population. In fact, a community already existed. With the help of a professional organizer, supported by the Neighborhood Matching Fund, the Downtown Latino Alliance was formed. Weekly meetings were held in a local park that served as a major gathering place for this group of Latino men. At the meetings, which ranged in size from 7 to 35 people, individuals were encouraged to voice opinions and raise concerns about their community. One issue of great concern was the availability of health care. Only one local health clinic had a Spanish-speaking nurse, and she was leaving. The Downtown Latino Alliance negotiated with the clinic to persuade it to hire another bilingual nurse.

Although their organizing effort was successful, the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project learned an important lesson the hard way. Because the community consisted of migrant farm workers, most members left the city in late spring to work on farms in rural areas. Even though Project organizers anticipated this

migration, they were not prepared for the devastation they felt after working so hard to organize the community. The experience taught them to include individuals and organizations that would add stability. For that reason, recent efforts have focused on involving Latino outreach workers and local Latino organizations in the Downtown Latino Alliance.

## **A Pro-Active Stance**

Most neighborhood groups spend their time reacting to problems and issues in their community. Sometimes they are reacting to the plans of the City or another government body, and sometimes they are reacting to the plans of a developer. In these instances, the neighborhood groups' agenda is set by outside forces. But this need not be the case. A neighborhood group can be *pro-active*. With a clear vision and a positive attitude, a group can improve rather than just protect its neighborhood.

# **Strategies for Effective Organizing**

## **The Organizer's Roles**

### **Share the Vision**

Sometimes the idea for a community organizing project originates with one or two people in the community. In the beginning, these people become the project's natural leaders. They have put the most time and energy into the idea. They fully understand the vision behind the project. It is the leaders' role, however, to share this vision and the power that comes with it. In this process, the leader becomes the organizer, enabling others to tap into and harness the power of that vision.

Janine VanSanden, a lead organizer of the Meadowbrook Wetlands Restoration Project, says "that for a project to be successful it has to be more than just a good idea." She believes that the most important step an organizer can take is to personally share the vision, joy, and passion that is behind a project. For VanSanden this meant talking about the project wherever she went, using her own personal networks, and always thinking of ways to involve more people.

An organization's vision is its driving force. Putting that vision into words, in the form of a mission statement, serves to keep that vision in focus. The statement explains why a group exists and what it hopes to accomplish. A group can revise and clarify its mission as often as it finds helpful.

### **Share the Work Load**

An important element of any neighborhood organizing project is involving as many people as possible in as many different tasks as possible. An effective organization is flexible and creates numerous opportunities for involvement. Organizations with multiple projects, or with projects that have a variety of tasks, will attract people with the widest range of skills and interests. An organization with multiple and various projects attracts people: it provides them with valuable experience and at the same time builds cohesiveness and team spirit. For people to share their skills with others is likewise valuable and team building.

On the other hand, taking on too many projects at once can spread people too thin and make it difficult to accomplish anything. Some organizers believe in enforcing the so-called Iron Rule of "Never do anything for people that they can do themselves." Teaching self-reliance can be an important part of building group confidence.

One challenge of working in a neighborhood group consisting primarily or solely of volunteers is that volunteers tend to come and go during a project's lifetime. So it is important to establish a core group of dedicated and reliable people at the beginning. These people will serve as leaders and see the project to completion.

According to Charlie Chong, a community organizer in West Seattle, a project needs six dedicated workers to be successful. This means people who are willing to devote long hours making phone calls, going door-to-door, meeting with City staff. Chong's experience has taught him that smaller groups of two or three people tend to burn out. But if a project can recruit 12 hard workers, the organization promises to be a strong one; and, he adds, with 24 hard workers, a group can run the city! Angela Toussaint of the Brighton-Dunlap Community Council says sharing the work requires discipline and dedication but results in a highly committed and effective group of people.

After sharing the work comes sharing the glory. Remember to give credit publicly, at meetings and through newsletters, to all who have worked on a project.

## **Identify Neighborhood Concerns: Choosing Issues**

When a community decides to organize without a particular issue in mind, it must go through the process of choosing an issue or project. The organizer is responsible for facilitating this process. The first step involves gathering data. Gathering data includes learning more about the community and its existing networks. Data gathering also means spending time listening to people, especially about the problems people face and want to do something about. You can collect information through one-on-one interviews, mail surveys, and small house meetings. Think ahead about the questions you want to ask and have a systematic way of recording responses. It is especially important to note how many times different people mention the same problem.

The organizer guides a group of people through the process of choosing an issue. The organizer does not choose the issue. When people participate in decision making, they are more likely to stay involved. The main thing to remember is that *the issue* should build the organization. The issue, therefore, should be one that involves and affects a large group of people who have more than that issue in common. When a group is just starting out, it usually does best with a simple project that can be completed fairly quickly. A project with a clear goal helps unite people. Successfully completing a project builds the confidence needed to tackle more challenging issues in the future. But even more importantly, people must feel good about what they are fighting for and be confident that it is worth their effort.

## **Hire Professional Help**

Whether or not to hire a professional organizer usually depends on resources. Every community council would benefit from having paid staff. A paid organizer can devote the time and energy necessary to reach out and involve neighborhood residents and to raise the resources needed for community organizing activities. Ironically, it is often lower-income communities that have the greatest need for professional organizers. And who that organizer is, says David Foecke of the Harrison-Denny Community Council, can make all the difference between success and failure.

A couple of years ago, the Harrison-Denny Community Council consisted of a small group of predominantly white, middle-class residents. Community response to the Council was poor. Foecke and others wanted to see Council membership reflect the rich diversity of Central District residents. So with a Neighborhood Matching Fund award from the Department of Neighborhoods, the Council began an active search for a professional community organizer. Because the Council especially wanted to appeal to people of color living in the community, members agreed that it was crucial that the organizer be African-American. As Foecke put it, "who the organizer is will determine how the community will react to the organizing effort."



The Council was able to find a talented African-American woman after an extended search with strong affirmative action guidelines. Pamela English first conducted a needs assessment by going door-to-door, asking people what they thought were the community's greatest concerns. She made an extra effort to reach those living in the most neglected parts of the neighborhood. The top issues to emerge were those concerning youth, in particular, drug use and child care. English developed an active campaign surrounding these issues by involving new people in the Council. The executive committee went from being 90 percent white to being 50 percent white, 50 percent African-American. General membership doubled. Today when the Council holds its annual dinner, those in attendance reflect the diversity of the community at large.

Foecke notes that the process of involving people in the community is as important as any end result. It was essential that English did not start out with an issue in mind but rather let *the community* determine what to address. Foecke believes that a set issue in the beginning will serve only to attract a certain group of people: it makes more sense first to build a council that is truly representative of the community and then take it from there.

## **Membership Building**

### **Publicize Issues and Events**

The best way to recruit members is to "go public." The importance of public relations and a good image cannot be overstated. There are many creative ways to publicize your group. The most effective approach is to conduct a membership campaign or organizing drive in which volunteers distribute information door-

door and personally invite people to join the community effort. Another approach is to network through schools, churches, recreation associations, senior centers. When the Mt. Baker Community Club was organizing to renovate its building after a fire, the Club sent notices home with elementary school students.

Some groups have published simple directories to neighborhood services, cultural opportunities, and recreation facilities. The directories list important telephone numbers, including that of the neighborhood group. Some have developed brochures describing local neighborhood organizations and how to get involved. Others are beginning to experiment with using electronic mail to communicate through any computer terminal with a modem.

Take advantage of local media. Groups can write articles for local newspapers. The Eastlake Community Council produced a four-page supplement to be included in the local paper. Groups can contact local radio and TV stations to cover special events and, in some cases, neighborhood meetings. Having a slide show or videotape that chronicles the history of your group can be useful. Newsletters can also be a good way to recruit new members. The Department of Neighborhoods once offered to print an issue of a newsletter free of charge if volunteers would distribute it to every household in the neighborhood: as a result, some organizations gained 100 to 200 new members. You might consider having stationary printed or designing a group logo. A logo helps people immediately identify letters, posters, and fliers with your group. You can display your logo on t-shirts, buttons, or bumper stickers.

### **Keep People Informed**

Recruiting new members is not the only reason to publicize group activities. It is important to keep long-standing members informed. Newsletters are an effective way for most community groups to communicate, but can be costly and time consuming. There are, however, ways to reduce newsletter costs. Groups can sell advertising space to local businesses or may be able to persuade a local printer to print the newsletter free of charge or at a discount. Some groups save postage costs by delivering the newsletter to residents or by using a larger group's bulk mail permit. Other groups publish their newsletter quarterly or, instead of a full-fledged newsletter, publish a simple letter or fact sheet. Whatever you publish, be creative and make it interesting to read. Include a little of everything to appeal to as wide an audience as possible.

Another way to inform people about an upcoming event or special activity is through a telephone tree or pyramid.

## **Make Events Fun**

Sometimes community groups take themselves too seriously and forget to have fun. This is hard on volunteers who donate precious time and energy. Consider it a good investment to make the effort to sponsor special events and activities for your volunteers to enjoy. Creative and fun ways to involve people in the community can be found throughout Seattle as seen in the following examples.

The Denny Regrade neighborhood has no fewer than six active community organizations, each with its own agenda. Consequently, one of the primary functions of the Denny Regrade Community Council has been to encourage the various groups to work with and trust each other. The Council recently organized a couple of special events that have served to unite the community. On a warm summer day, the community held a paint-out, to paint over graffiti in the neighborhood, and followed it with a big picnic. Each of the community groups was responsible for reaching out to its own members and encouraging them to attend. The event was a great success.

Another event that the Council has organized—twice in three years—is the Belltown Inside-Out Arts Festival. Described by community organizer Tim Hatley, “the Festival tries to capture the Belltown spirit.” The “inside” of the name refers to house tours for which tickets are sold, and the “out,” to the outdoor art displays. The event involves the entire neighborhood and lasts for three days. Business owners agree to display art, restaurants offer special discounts, and galleries kick off the Festival with open gallery tours.

A big one-day tree planting event, organized by Liz Ellis and others at the Miller Park Neighborhood Association, mixed fun with hard work. Trees planted on several residential blocks served both to beautify the neighborhood and to pull people together. It was a great project for the Neighborhood Association because it was so inclusive: just about everybody loves trees. Most of the neighbors, some police and fire workers, and a local half-way house helped in the planting. A local mental health organization and local businesses also helped. The project was a good case of how a project can be divided into parts that can be tailored to different people’s abilities.

David and Joy Huber of the Eastlake Community Council view community as an extension of family. They believe in maintaining a high level of commitment to the community and in developing true friendships among community members. They see the Eastlake Community Council as an organization designed to respond not only to community needs. They believe in fostering an organization’s social aspects. David Huber notes that, in his experience, groups in which people get along are the most effective. The Hubers have helped to create something of an organizational culture surrounding the Council. Every Thursday evening they open their house to the whole community. They also open their larder. They find that having food at events usually helps break down formalities and make people feel more comfortable. A potluck, where everyone brings a dish, is best of all because it is a creative, collective effort.

## **Hold Community Meetings**

The first event for many community organizations is a neighborhood meeting. Most groups start out with a large meeting to which everyone in the neighborhood is invited. Such an initial, all-neighborhood meeting requires a planning committee to work out details such as discussion topics, guest speakers, where and when to hold the meeting, and how to publicize it.

When the Brighton-Dunlap Community Council plans a large community meeting, each leader commits to bringing a certain number of people. Quota sheets list who each leader has contacted in the community, whether that person will be attending the meeting, and if a second call has been made. Leaders operate on the assumption that they need to contact twice as many people as they hope will attend the meeting.

Another approach is to hold smaller house meetings where the host or hosts personally invite people to attend. These smaller meetings are particularly good for introducing newer members to the group. Short presentations are made and refreshments served.

Remember that anywhere you hold a public meeting must be accessible to persons with disabilities.

## **Involve the Whole Neighborhood: Diversity Matters!**

A true neighborhood organizing project reaches out to include everyone in the community. An organization's membership—as well as its board of directors, committee members, and active volunteers—should reflect the neighborhood's population. Although you may have to make an extra effort to ensure that the group is diverse—in gender, race, age, income, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, homeowner or tenant, and cultural or religious background—the effort is well worth it. Diverse groups have more ideas and experience to offer. And they are more apt to earn respect from people both within and outside the community.

The Rainier Community Center wanted more diversity on its Advisory Council. The Council plans to oversee the building of a new community center. The old center is used by many families in the neighborhood. It serves as a central meeting place, especially for youth, and has basketball courts and other recreational facilities. Most families who regularly use the center, and the majority of Advisory Council members, are African-American, and they wanted to make an extra effort to include the growing Asian population in the planning and ultimate use of the new center. So the Rainier Advisory Council hired a professional organizer who interviewed a diverse group of people from the community and recruited a number of new people to sit on the Advisory Council. Stan Hiserman of the Council advises that personal contact is key to building any community organization, especially when developing cross-cultural relationships.

The Puget Ridge Neighborhood Council was in the process of developing a survey to take door-to-door, asking people about various community services and ideas for community organizing projects. Puget Ridge is a very diverse neighborhood. Many residents speak English as a second language and some speak no English at all. Council members were concerned that the survey would not reach these people. When this was raised at a Council meeting, there was someone who knew a person who could translate the survey into Cambodian and Vietnamese on his computer, and another who volunteered to translate it into Spanish.

Council members were thrilled when the Washington State Service Corps offered volunteer help. The Corps had 20 volunteers—including people bilingual in Cambodian, Spanish, and Vietnamese—willing to help Council members go door-to-door to conduct the surveys in person. Sandy Lea coordinated the effort and, along with Service Corps member Thu Nygen, helped train survey volunteers. The volunteers interviewed over 52 households in under two hours.

At the top of the “Puget Ridge News,” the Council's newsletter, “For more information, call...” is written in Cambodian, Chinese, Laotian, Samoan, Spanish, and Vietnamese, followed by the names and phone numbers of volunteers who can translate the newsletter into those languages.

Often groups want to become more diverse but don't know where to start. Members can't figure out what they are doing wrong since they are not intentionally keeping certain communities of people from joining their efforts. If this sounds like your group, there are a few things you can do. The first is to reach out and talk to people in minority communities in your neighborhood. Ask them how they perceive the group and what steps the group could take to make people in their community feel more comfortable. Try to tap into existing networks, such as churches and social clubs. Often it's easier to bring in a whole network than it is to bring in one individual.

Your group might want to consider providing rides to or child care during a community meeting or special event. Sometimes, for example, tenants live in a different part of the neighborhood than homeowner

members. It is important that meeting places and events be accessible to all, including single parents, young people, the elderly and others.

One local diversity trainer suggests that organizations write an affirmative action commitment statement, with a plan and time table for recruiting paid and unpaid positions. This sends a strong message to the community that an organization is serious about increasing diversity on its board, advisory groups, and among its officers and members.

Another important step your group can take is to educate its members about issues of concern to communities of color and ethnic minority groups. A couple of publications that touch on the topics of equity, diversity, and inclusiveness can help you learn more. The Center for Third World Organizing in Oakland, California publishes a magazine called *Third Force*: call (510)533-7583 for a free sample and subscription information. The Applied Research Center, also in Oakland, compiles *Race File*, a collection of current newspaper articles with commentary and opinion, published every two months: call (510) 834-7072 for more information.

Seattle has a number of local ethnic and cultural newspapers that may interest your group. For subscription information, contact each paper directly.

*Asia Today*, 17250 Bothell Way NE, 98155 (206) 365-8807

*Cambodian Community News*, (206) 277-7184

*The Facts*, 2765 E Cherry St (206) 324-0552

*Filipino-American Herald*, 2824 S Brandon, 98108

*Impacto Latino*, PO Box 4714 Federal Way (253) 945-1141

*International Examiner*, 622 S Washington (206) 624-3925

*Jewish Transcript*, 2041 3rd Ave, 98121 (206) 441-4553

*Korea Daily Central News* 13749 Midvale N (206) 365-4000

*Korea Times*, 430 Yale N, 98109 (206) 622-2851

*The Medium*, 2600 S Jackson St., 98144 (206) 323-3070

*Northwest Asian Weekly*, 414 8th Ave. S, 98104 (206) 223-0623

*Phuong Dong, Inc.* 622 39<sup>th</sup> S (206) 760-9168

*Seattle Chinese Post* 414 8<sup>th</sup> S (206) 223-0623

*Seattle Gay News*, 1605 12<sup>th</sup> Ave (206) 324-4297

*Vietnamese NW Newspaper* 3107 Martin Luther King Jr Way S (206) 722-6984

## Organizational Structure

### Utilize Procedures

Setting rules and establishing procedure may sound dull and tedious but it will save your group time and much frustration down the line. Some basic guidelines will help you organize community meetings and keep group records. Documenting group activities not only benefits current members but helps new and potential members as well. You may find it useful to create information packets or hold orientation sessions for new members.

#### 1) Public Meetings

A good working relationship among members will help a neighborhood association succeed. Since most contact between people occurs at meetings, it is important to conduct meetings fairly and efficiently. A planning committee can work out meeting details beforehand. The committee members set goals for the meeting by determining what needs to be accomplished. They will also want to review the minutes of the last meeting to see if any issues were left unresolved. When presenting information to the larger group, keep items brief and use visual aids when possible.

Some groups use Robert's Rules of Order (condensed versions are available in most libraries) to facilitate discussions and make group decisions. These rules follow parliamentary procedure—which is fine for

some groups—provided that everyone understands the rules. Other groups operate better using their own set of rules. The only thing that applies to all groups is the need for all decisions to be made democratically by the whole membership.

To avoid voting, which leaves some people winners and others losers, a group may decide to make decisions by consensus. Reaching agreement by consensus results in a more satisfying and enduring decision because people are able to speak their minds and come to a compromise. Consensus is the only form of decision making that truly builds the organization. Keep in mind, however, that sometimes a consensus cannot be reached. A group seeking but failing to reach consensus needs to weigh the consequences of further deliberation versus moving on by taking a traditional vote. If a group is in conflict over an issue, looking for “areas of agreement” can help.

Community organizer Charlie Chong emphasizes that it is important to conduct meetings in a way in which community participants feel comfortable. When Chong was working in neighborhoods in rural Arkansas, each meeting began with a prayer and ended with a song because that was how people were accustomed to opening and ending social gatherings.

To make people feel welcome, greet them at the door and introduce new members around. Having light refreshments before or after (but not during) the meeting makes people feel more comfortable and encourages further socializing (without being an interruption).

## 2) Agenda

One key to holding effective meetings is preparing an agenda—and sticking to it! The agenda is prepared in advance by the meeting planning committee. Keep your agenda short and simple. The committee can determine beforehand how much time to devote to each agenda item and include the time on the printed sheet. Keep the meeting under 90 minutes—after that, people get tired—and start and end on time. At the beginning of the meeting, general members review and approve the agenda.

## 3) Minute Book

Have someone record minutes at every meeting so that you have a complete record of the group’s decisions and activities. If the group has no secretary, rotate the task among members. Minutes should include all relevant information: items presented, decisions made, votes taken, tasks assigned, and the next meeting place and time. Keep the original minutes in one book in a safe place. Other important documents, such as bylaws and IRS forms, can also be filed in the minute book.

## 4) Follow-up

It is essential to provide a sign-up sheet at all meetings and events to record the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of all who attend. This enables follow-up. Some groups ask those who attend to complete a written evaluation of the meeting or event. Other groups call people to encourage their further participation.

Groups may also want to have sign-up sheets available for members to join various committees or volunteer for certain tasks.

# Manage Your Budget

All neighborhood groups need to keep track of any money that comes in or goes out. Groups that deal with small amounts of money can have a very simple bookkeeping system: a cash receipts journal records all money coming into the organization, when it was received, and where it came from; a cash disbursements journal records money paid out from each bank account. Groups that deal with many different sources of receipts or have many different categories of disbursements may need to set up a more detailed accounting system. In that case, it is a good idea to ask a trained accountant to help set up the system. There may be an accountant in your neighborhood who would volunteer time.

The treasurer or another designated person should prepare a written financial report each month. The report covers all financial activity including cash at the beginning of the month, total receipts and disbursements during the month, and cash at the end of the month. Remember to account for postage, printing, and other supplies.

Larger organizations may decide to use more formal financial reports, such as a Balance Sheet and Statements of Support, Revenue and Expenses.

The important thing is to do what works best and makes most sense for your particular organization.

## **Create a Formal Organization: Legal Requirements and Options**

Neighborhood groups may choose to organize in different ways, depending on the size and scope of their activities. For one group, creating a formal structure can provide much-needed stability and predictability. For another group, a more flexible structure can allow it to adapt to different environments more easily. This section describes what is needed to be legally recognized as an organization and some options within that basic structure.

### **1) Bylaws**

All groups need to have written bylaws or more informal, but still written, operating procedures. Bylaws are simply the rules governing an organization's internal operations. Written bylaws are not required by law unless an organization decides to incorporate. Bylaws should include the group's name and purpose and information on membership, terms of officers, committees, meetings, voting procedure, dues, and anything else of importance. Board members and key officers—the chair, vice chair, secretary, and treasurer—are elected according to the bylaws.

### **2) Local Business License**

A group that wants to exchange a product or a service for a fee, must obtain a local business license in the jurisdiction where it will operate. In Seattle the license costs \$65 per calendar year. For a form or more information, call the City of Seattle Department of Licenses at 684-8484.

### **3) Articles of Incorporation**

Whether or not to incorporate is up to the neighborhood organization. In some cases incorporation helps define a group and contributes to its credibility. The corporation is the legal entity responsible for its members' actions. Incorporation can protect a group's members from personal liability. However, incorporation does not guarantee that you as an individual will not be sued. In any case, it is a good idea to seek legal advice when deciding whether to incorporate, especially if your organization plans to engage in any activities that could possibly result in a lawsuit.

Incorporating, however, is not appropriate for all groups. A group can accomplish many activities without corporate status. Incorporating can turn out to be very complex. For more information, call the Secretary of State Corporations Division at (206) 753-7120. To order forms, call (206)753-7115.

### **4) Registering with the Secretary of State**

Any organization planning to ask for money and expecting to raise \$5,000 or more in a given year, must apply to register as a charitable organization with the Secretary of State. This must be done before fundraising has commenced. It costs \$20 to register. A \$10 annual fee is paid only in those years that the group expects to raise funds. Even if your group plans to do very little fundraising, your registering gives donors a way to verify the group's legitimacy. And, if your group chooses to hire an outside fundraiser, the Secretary of State can provide you with the required Fundraising Service Contract.

The Secretary of State can also provide a Master Business License application, which is required for many organizations. For either application or more information, call 1-800-332-4483.

#### 5) Federal Tax ID Number

A Federal Tax ID Number works like a Social Security number for an organization. You need it to open a bank account and use it to apply for tax-exempt status and to file other IRS tax forms. For a form or for more information, call the IRS at 1-800-829-3676 or, in Seattle, 442-1040.

#### 6) Federal Tax Exempt Status

Tax exempt status is frequently confused with incorporation, but a nonprofit corporation is not necessarily tax exempt. Usually, a group must be incorporated before it can apply for tax exemption: tax exempt status is granted by the federal government upon application to the IRS. If your group is tax exempt, donors can deduct contributions from their income tax. All foundations and most large donors require that groups be tax exempt, or that they use a tax exempt organization as their fiscal agent. (Note that federal tax exempt status does not exempt an organization from state taxation.) For a form, call the IRS at 1-800-829-3676.

For more information on bylaws, articles of incorporation, and tax exempt status, including sample documents of each, see "How to Form a Non-Profit Corporation in Washington State," published by the Seattle-King County Bar Association. To purchase a copy, call the Bar Association at 624-9365. The Bar Association also coordinates a program in which attorneys volunteer to provide no-cost legal assistance to individuals and neighborhood groups.

## **Networking in the Community and Beyond**

### **Neighborhood Resources**

Neighborhood groups cannot survive without resources: materials and volunteer labor as well as cash. It is best to raise money from different sources rather than put all of your eggs in one basket. Money may come from membership dues, special events, outside grants. It is important to have a fundraising plan with specific objectives and a time table. Angela Toussaint of the Brighton-Dunlap Community Council suggests that a group have enough funds secured beforehand to complete its project.

Community groups are often surprised by just how many valuable resources exist in their own back yard. People are often unaware of their neighbors' skills and talents. We immediately think of the obvious skills of certain kinds of professionals or crafts people. But a community group cannot afford to forget the less apparent skills of, for example, those who are good listeners, well organized, or fond of children or elderly people. Tapping into local resources and existing networks, whatever they may be, helps build a solid community organization.

### **Raising Money for a Special Purpose**

A couple of years ago the Mt. Baker Community Club building was badly damaged in a fire. It was an old building that was expensive to maintain. Nevertheless, many people in the neighborhood felt a strong connection to the old clubhouse which served as the center for much community activity. Members of the Community Club decided to use the insurance money and raise additional funds to renovate the building. They began an extensive fundraising campaign. As a former resident of the neighborhood and ex-president of the Club, Mayor Rice agreed to serve as honorary chair of the campaign. His high profile helped draw attention to the effort.

At a large community meeting held at a local elementary school, people signed up to serve on various fundraising committees. Sandy Monroe helped with the community auction, which was a great success. A wide range of goods and services were auctioned, from homemade cookies to babysitting, from legal will

preparation to a week at a beach house in Costa Rica. Afterwards, Monroe assumed responsibility for coordinating all fundraising activities, including the major donor campaign. She and others identified people who currently or previously lived in the community and approached them in person for a donation.

The Mt. Baker Community Club was able to raise \$275,000 in only six months. The renovations have been completed and because the new rental space has been so popular, it costs Club members relatively little to maintain. One of the more important lessons learned during the campaign, says Monroe, is that you never know who the big givers in the community are going to be. People's generosity was sometimes startling. All donors were sent a thank you letter and will have their names listed on a plaque in the new building.

## **Collaborating with Other Groups**

Community organizations can often accomplish more if they work with, rather than against, other neighborhood groups. In communities with a number of active groups, each with its own agenda, encouraging cooperation can be a challenge. But cooperation is sometimes the only way a park or community center can be built, traffic problems be resolved, or community services improve. Groups that work together are more effective in getting what they want. They also save time and energy by pooling information and sharing resources.

One kind of community organization found in most neighborhoods is a chamber of commerce or business association. Most chambers around Seattle are staffed by volunteers and operate much like community councils. Their purpose is to serve the local business community. Although most of their members are businesses, chambers like the one in Greenwood have community residents as members also. Ron Lewis, long an active member of the Greenwood Chamber, believes that chambers and community organizations are often closely aligned on issues and would benefit from working together. He points out that in many communities, membership in the groups already overlap significantly.

One issue that most communities and chambers care a great deal about is traffic in the business district. Businesses want to be accessible to road traffic and have adequate parking space for customers. Community residents are also interested in having the business district—often the center of a community—easily accessible. Both businesses and residents want town centers designed to accommodate public transportation, pedestrians, and alternative forms of transportation such as bicycles. Housing is another issue that affects both community groups and businesses alike. And both groups benefit from lower crime, cleaner streets, and better schools. Lewis hopes that chambers and community groups will realize the importance of working together on these and other issues.

When you consider collaborating with other groups, remember that local churches and social clubs, such as the Lions Club, and Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops, can be great sources of volunteer labor. Many community organizations provide meeting space and other in-kind services.

## **City Resources: The Department of Neighborhoods**

The Department of Neighborhoods offers a number of services to neighborhood organizations through its four main divisions. 1) The Neighborhood Programs Division provides organizational development assistance to neighborhood groups through a variety of programs outlined following. 2) The Neighborhood Service Centers offer various services, also listed following. 3) The Citizens Service Bureau is the place to contact for information about City services. For information and referral, call 684-2489. 4) The Historic Preservation Division encourages the preservation and rehabilitation of historic neighborhoods and landmarks. For more information, call 684-0228.

### **Programs**

**Training Workshops.** These workshops cover topics such as community organizing, leadership development, and fundraising. For information about scheduled workshops or to request specific training in your neighborhood, call the Department at 684-0464.



**Neighborhood Experts Exchange.** Department staff have developed an extensive list of expert volunteers who have recent hands-on experience in managing community organizations and developing neighborhood projects. If your group wants short-term help on a specific problem or concern, these volunteers can provide valuable advice. For more information, call the Department at 684-0464.

**Consulting.** Department staff are available to help you strengthen and build your organization. Leaders from your group can choose to work one-on-one with staff on a specifically agreed on organizational problem or opportunity. Groups may choose to establish a longer-term consulting relationship. This service is designed specifically for neighborhoods with no existing organizations, and for revitalizing neighborhood organizations in low-income communities. To set up an exploratory interview for either service, call 684-0464.

**Funding Awards.** The Department of Neighborhoods has three distinct funds, each a part of the Neighborhood Matching Fund, for financial support to neighborhood groups. For application forms and deadlines, call 684-0464. 1) The Large Projects Fund awards up to \$100,000 to projects that can be completed within 12 months 2) The Small and Simple Projects Fund awards up to \$15,000 to projects that can be completed within six months of the award. Both of these funds provide a cash match to community contributions of volunteer time, professional services, and materials. 3) The Neighborhood Outreach Fund awards up to \$750 for membership expansion or leadership development of neighborhood groups.

## Neighborhood Service Centers

Neighborhood Service Centers serve neighborhoods throughout Seattle and can prove invaluable as you begin your neighborhood organizing effort. Center coordinators can tell you what groups and organizations are active in your area. They are knowledgeable about other neighborhood resources as well. Neighborhood Service Centers maintain demographic data, crime statistics, and other useful information that may help identify neighborhood trends and needs. Also available at the Centers are recent City documents, land use ordinances, City and neighborhood plans and programs, and Neighborhood Matching Fund information and applications.

Center coordinators can advise you of City programs and initiatives that are likely to directly affect your neighborhood. Coordinators can also provide insight into the history and dynamics of recent efforts to mobilize your community. Understanding what in the past has and has not been effective for others in your neighborhood can save you time and frustration. Following is a listing of the Centers and coordinators for Seattle.

<b>Ballard:</b> 2305 NW Market St. 98107, <i>Rob Mattson</i>	684-4060
<b>Capitol Hill:</b> 501 19th Ave. E 98112, <i>Jose Cervantes</i>	684-4574
<b>Central:</b> 2301 S Jackson St. 98144, <i>Ted Divina</i>	233-7257
<b>Delridge:</b> 5405 Delridge Way SW 98106, <i>Ron Angeles</i>	684-7416
<b>Downtown:</b> 820 Virginia St. 98101, <i>Gary Johnson</i>	233-8560
<b>Fremont:</b> 908 N 34th St. 98103, <i>Steve Louie</i>	684-4054
<b>Gtr Duwamish:</b> 3801 Beacon Ave. 98108, <i>Glenn Harris</i>	233-2044
<b>Greenwood:</b> 8515 Greenwood Ave. N 98103, <i>Beth Pflug</i>	684-4096
<b>Lake City:</b> 12707 30th Ave. NE 98125, <i>Ed Pottharst</i>	711,386-4232
<b>Queen Anne/Magnolia:</b> 157 Roy St, 98109, <i>John Leonard</i>	684-4812
<b>Southeast:</b> 4859 Rainier Ave. S 98118, <i>Pamela Green</i>	386-1931
<b>West Seattle:</b> 4750 California Ave SW, <i>Stan Lock</i>	233-2045
<b>University:</b> 4534 University Way NE 98105, <i>Karen Ko</i>	233-3732

## **A Town Hall Meeting**

A few years ago a small group of people formed to revitalize the Lake City Community Council, which was in a slump. Nobody was coming to meetings organized by the Council around the need for a community center. Not knowing where to start, the small group called Jim Diers, Director of the Department of Neighborhoods. Diers suggested a town hall meeting at which residents identify their neighborhood's most pressing needs. The group invited newly elected Mayor Rice and various City Council members to join the town hall meeting.

The letter they sent to the Mayor explained what they hoped to accomplish at the meeting. After Mayor Rice accepted, they invited City Council members. Then they distributed fliers inviting everyone in the community to attend. They concentrated on tapping into existing community networks: churches, youth groups, service clubs, PTAs. It worked: over 100 people came.

The meeting was organized in two parts. The first hour included talks by the Mayor and City Council members, with a question-and-answer period afterward. During the second hour, people broke into small groups to discuss issues that they thought needed to be addressed in the community. The top issues to emerge were youth activities and public safety.

Having identified these issues, the Lake City Community Council readied itself for action by focusing on building membership. Crucially, the Council acted on its recognition that every community is already organized; it built on existing networks. The group used a letter writing campaign to successfully lobby City Council members for funds to establish a late-night youth program at the Meadowbrook Community Center. Community Council members also led a successful fight for billboard regulation.

## **Private Funders**

Raising money from private foundations requires a lot of time and effort. It takes time to research foundations, file applications, and collect the required documentation. So make sure you thoroughly investigate local resources before looking for funding further afield.

Most foundations will support only tax-exempt organizations. However, if your group does not have its own tax-exempt status, it can use the tax-exempt status of another organization. Such an organization acts as a fiscal sponsor. Local churches and human service agencies often can serve as fiscal sponsors for neighborhood projects.

One of the best places to begin your research is at the downtown Seattle Public Library. The Library has a collection of reference materials and handouts on foundations as well as other information on fundraising. The Foundation Collection is located at the Science and Social Services Reference Desk on the second floor. For further information, call the Science and Social Services Reference Desk at 386-4620.

If your group uses a fiscal sponsor, try to tap into the sponsor's network of funders. Groups working on projects with a social justice outcome can contact the local progressive foundations which support organizing projects. For information and applications from two progressive funders in Seattle, call A Territory Resource at 624-4081 and the Peace Development Fund at 525-0025.

Other foundations in the area may support your group, depending on the type of project you propose. Be sure to research a foundation's interests and grantmaking priorities before you contact it. The Pacific Northwest Grantmakers Forum publishes an annual directory of its members. Included are private foundations and corporate contributions programs serving the Pacific Northwest. The directory also lists other resources and gives advice on applying for funds. To purchase a copy, call 624-9899. (A reference copy is available at the Department of Neighborhoods.)

## Other Resources

Exploring other outside resources for technical assistance and training can prove worthwhile. For example, local universities and colleges have assisted neighborhood groups in the past through programs in social work and urban planning. Such help often depends on a particular professor or on student interest, but a few phone calls to various schools may lead you to available—and invaluable—resources. Also, local trade associations may be able to offer assistance.

Organizer training centers are located throughout the United States. The center closest to Seattle is the Western States Center in Portland, Oregon. It offers a training and mentoring program for organizers and leaders, as well as an annual event that includes training in fundraising, management, and community development. For more information, call (503) 228-8866.

## What Next?

### Evaluation

Often after a group successfully completes an organizing project, group members wonder what they should do next. In some cases the answer to this question will be more obvious than in others. Sometimes it will make sense to tackle another project which can build on the momentum of the previous project. This is what the Fremont Neighborhood Council did with their Capacity Building Project. The Project naturally evolved out of the Council's two previous projects and in turn has led to the development of yet another project.

On the other hand, all community groups go through cycles of activity and inactivity. This is perfectly normal: no group can maintain a high level of enthusiasm forever. If your group seems to be cycling into inactivity, members may decide to take a break. This is an ideal time for a group to step back and evaluate itself. In fact, monitoring the health of an organization should be done at regular intervals. Group leaders suggest using a self-assessment tool once a year. Regular self-assessment lets an organization chart its successes and pinpoint its chronic troubles.

### Sample Self-Assessment Tool

The Department of Neighborhoods has compiled the following Neighborhood Organization Self-Evaluation Checklist. The checklist provides a way for a group to rate its skill or knowledge in a number of specific areas. Since this list is extensive, some areas will not apply to your group. Likewise, other areas in which your group excels may not be listed.

Mark each bulleted point with *NI* (Needs Improvement), *S* (Satisfactory), *E* (Excellent), or *NA* (Not Applicable). You also might want to note those areas your group has designated as high priorities for improvement. Group leaders can copy the following information onto a worksheet with columns for the ratings and enough space for comments.

#### Neighborhood Organization Self-Evaluation Checklist

##### I. Organization

- Has written mission and bylaws (or operating procedures).
- Develops annual goals and work plan.
- Annually evaluates organizational activities.
- Meetings are held regularly, widely publicized, and open (anaccessible) to the public.
- Meetings are well organized; a written agenda is followed.

Meetings start and end on time.  
Written minutes are kept and distributed.

II. Leadership

Reflects neighborhood population.  
Articulates issues clearly.  
Well versed in meeting facilitation.  
Uses democratic participatory methods to make decisions.  
Communicates regularly with group about financial status, key issues, work plan, etc.  
Knowledgeable about local government and how to influence decision making.

III. Communication

Produces and distributes newsletter regularly.  
Produces and distributes annual report or fact sheet.  
Maintains written record of decisions and policies.  
Meetings are adequately advertised in the neighborhood.  
Convenes an annual meeting for entire membership/community.  
Arranges public forums or other educational or informational events.  
Maintains good relationship with local media.  
Makes presence known at public hearings and before official bodies.

IV. Diversity

Leaders and members reflect neighborhood's diversity (race, age, homeowners/tenants, income, etc.).  
Meeting places are accessible to persons with disabilities.  
Group involves non- or limited-English speaking persons.  
Issues addressed by group are representative of active and not-so-active members.

V. Volunteers

Group recruits and maintains active members.  
Group provides orientation for new members.  
Volunteers clearly understand their role in the group.  
Volunteers are held accountable for their assignments.  
Volunteers are motivated and stay involved.  
Volunteers are clear about the group's agenda, goals, and tactics.

VI. Resources

Diverse fundraising skills are held by group members.  
Sets annual fundraising goals.  
Develops annual fundraising plan and calendar.  
Plans and implements fundraising events.  
Evaluates fundraising plan at least once a year.  
Raises grassroots money by asking members to solicit it.  
Conducts timely research on sources for renewable money.  
Has knowledge of Washington State Charitable Solicitations Act.  
Maintains 501(c)(3) tax exempt status.

## **Wrap-up**

This booklet is by no means a comprehensive guide to neighborhood organizing. Rather, it provides a quick glance at some important elements to consider when organizing a project.

Remember that running a community organization is never a straightforward process. Many of the issues and strategies outlined in this booklet need to be revisited throughout an organization's lifetime. But running a community organization can be done, and done successfully, as demonstrated by the example of Seattle neighborhood groups, both those that are mentioned here and the greater number that are not mentioned.